

## A Report on *Introduction to Global Citizenship*, a course offered by The University of British Columbia, Canada, 2005-2006

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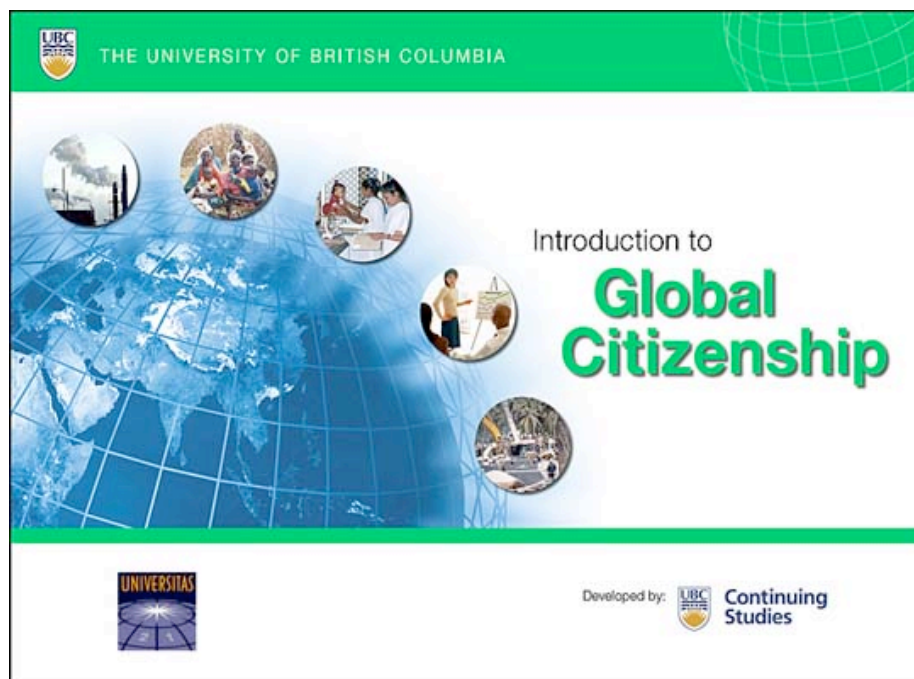
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## Executive Summary

UBC has developed *Introduction to Global Citizenship*, the core course of the new *Universitas 21 Program in Global Issues*, as a multidisciplinary online course designed to promote discussion and debate of the notion of ‘global citizenship’, and to bridge students’ disciplinary learning with questions of their role in the world.

The course launched in September 2005, and two iterations of the course have now been completed, enrolling 63 students from UBC, Hong Kong University and the University of Melbourne. Students were culturally diverse, and drawn from many disciplines. Instructors were similarly diverse. Data suggests that the course has attracted high-achieving students.

Instructors observed extensive inter-student discussion, idea-sharing and peer-teaching within the course. Student writing, discussion contributions and feedback suggest that the course was a challenging, inspiring and unusual learning experience. Students displayed evidence of increased critical thinking, understanding of linkages between ‘global issues’, and reflection on their learning and experience. Many described an increased commitment to participatory action as citizens, locally and globally.

The mean student grade was 82% (A-), with a real grade range of 57% (C-) to 95% (A+). Most students were in Year 3 or 4 of an undergraduate degree program, but 15 were in Year 1 or 2. Year 1 students performed significantly more poorly than older students, achieving a mean grade of 63% (C). We suggest that these students may lack some of the academic maturity and study skills to manage a course at this level.

Students evaluated the course via a tool administered by the UBC Faculty of Education, and rated the course with an overall mean score of 6.43, versus the Faculty average of 5.65. In anonymous prose feedback opportunities, students gave positive feedback, rating highly the value of group discussion with international peers, instructional support, and the challenge of synthesizing course topics with personal action.

In semester 1, students expressed unhappiness with workload and a lack of clarity regarding assessment criteria. To address these concerns, in semester 2 we reduced the frequency of written assignments and rewrote information pages on coursework and grading. We also plan to continue upgrading and updating the course, in particular through integration of video and audio lecture materials on global issues topics.

## Background

Trek 2010<sup>1</sup>, the Vision Statement of The University of British Columbia (hereafter, UBC) articulates the wish that UBC will

*"prepare students to become exceptional global citizens, [and] promote the values of a civil and sustainable society "*

With this goal in mind, UBC has entered into a collaboration with four of its like-minded *Universitas 21* partners (The University of Auckland, New Zealand; Hong Kong University; The University of Melbourne, Australia; and the University of Nottingham, England) to develop and jointly offer an interdisciplinary *Program in Global Issues* to enable students to complete a formal course of study that gives a global context to their degree.

The report describes the development and launch of the core introductory course, *Introduction to Global Citizenship* by the University of British Columbia.

### ***What do we mean by Global Citizenship?***

The meaning of “global citizenship” is hotly debated and poorly defined. Developing an introductory course to this contested concept, and one that is so tightly connected to questions of global power, culture and values, was therefore no small undertaking. We also recognized that participating students would represent a great diversity of cultural and disciplinary backgrounds, necessitating attention to cultural assumptions underlying contemporary models of citizenship and worldview. Nor could we assume deep background knowledge in any one topic area. We resolved therefore that topics within the purview of “global citizenship” would be presented for debate, discussion and critical analysis by each student cohort.

### ***Goal of the Course: Transformative Learning, Transforming Perspectives***

*Introduction to Global Citizenship* is now an interdisciplinary and highly interactive fully online course that hopes to “equip graduates with knowledge and competencies which will enable them to work and participate as global citizens” (U21 MoU, 2005). The course has been designed to inspire students to: consider the concept of “global citizenship” and develop their own definition of this complex and contested notion; acquire a broad understanding of barriers and bridges to global citizenship; acquire a broad understanding of issues of key concern to the international community; and consider the impact they may have, as global citizens, within their local, national and international communities.

Importantly, in designing this course, we hoped to create a learning experience for students that was not simply one of ‘acquiring new knowledge’. Rather, we aimed to achieve what Jack Mezirow<sup>2</sup> and others have described in recent decades as “transformative learning” – a process in which learners participate in rational discourse

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.trek2000.ubc.ca/>

<sup>2</sup> Mezirow, Jack. (1991). *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

about and critical reflection on their experience in ways that permit transformations of perspective. Perspective transformation, says Mezirow (1991)

*"...is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings"*

In other words, we recognized that we would attract to this course a wide range of students who would bring with them large stores of knowledge. We hoped to harness their existing skills and experience to participate in critical reflection and discourse about the connections between their prior learning and their role in a globalizing world.

### **Course Development: Multiple Layers of Collaboration**

Our commitment to developing a course that would be interdisciplinary, innovative, student-centred, highly interactive and representative of and receptive to many worldviews, motivated us to undertake an ambitious collaborative course development process.

We developed the initial course outline with input from a wide range of local and international colleagues and resources: faculty and staff at the Office of UBC International; reports and materials from previous "global citizenship" activities on the UBC Campus; and interviews with faculty members across the UBC campus who had previously demonstrated an interest in the topic area (including individuals who have offered well-founded critiques and caveats regarding the concept of "global citizenship"<sup>3</sup>).

Topic areas were selected to create a course outline that would represent an introduction to a range of concepts and topics relevant to the discussion of "global citizenship" (see below). Twelve different subject matter experts, located at UBC and elsewhere in the world, drafted content for the modules contained in the course. Intellectual property concerns on the part of content developers were allayed through the joint signing by UBC and each developer of an intellectual property agreement developed in consultation with the UBC Faculty of Education and UBC Faculty Relations. All modules were edited for continuity and coherence, and additional course materials (assessment schema, guidelines for students, etc.) were drafted. Finally, online course design and development was carried out by a web programmer in UBC's Distance Education unit.

### ***Structure of the Course***

*Introduction to Global Citizenship* now comprises twelve weekly thematic modules, presented via the WebCT course management system. Instructors make use of WebCT communication tools to promote critical thinking and reflection through course readings,

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example: Roman, Leslie G. (2003). Education and the Contested Meanings of 'Global Citizenship', *Journal of Educational Change* (Special Issue, Guest Edited by Fazal Rizvi), vol. 4(3), pp.269-293.

facilitated (asynchronous) discussion with instructors and international peers, and regular written work.

Table 1: List of Course Modules

Module 1: An ethics of global citizenship	Module 7: Globalization, world trade and poverty
Module 2: What is 'citizenship'?	Module 8: The universal requirements for a healthy society
Module 3: The challenge of global divisions: Race, ethnicity, nation, state	Module 9: Consumerism and consumer choices
Module 4: Challenging old conceptions of citizenship: Diversity and multiculturalism	Module 10: Human impact on the environment: Global climate change
Module 5: The challenge of intercultural communication	Module 11: Sustainability
Module 6: The challenge of being informed: Media, communications and critical thinking	Module 12: Politics, participation and civil society

## Course Implementation and Launch

The pilot offering of *Introduction to Global Citizenship* launched in September 2005 with 42 students from UBC, Hong Kong University and the University of Melbourne. A second offering was delivered during UBC's spring term (January-April 2006), and enrolled 21 students.

The course has been hosted during the 2005-2006 academic year by the UBC Faculty of Education's Office of External Programs and Learning Technology, which provided students and instructors with technical assistance and support. UBC's Go Global Office (<http://students.ubc.ca/global/>) assisted with promoting the course to UBC students, and helped non-UBC students with course registration.

### *Collaboration in Teaching*

In line with the original vision of offering students a multidisciplinary and multi-voiced perspective on global citizenship and global issues, instructors have been selected from a range of disciplines as well as national and ethnic backgrounds.

Instructional Team, Fall 2005	Instructional Team, Spring 2006
Dr Leah Macfadyen (PhD Molecular Microbiology)	Dr Leah Macfadyen (PhD Molecular Microbiology)
Dr Begum Verjee (EdD, Educational Leadership and Policy)	Dr Dalene Swanson (PhD in Mathematics Education)
Sally McLean (BA Economics, MA in Liberal Studies)	
Anne Hewling (PhD, Educational Technologies)	

## The Students

Over the two semesters, a total of 63 students have completed *Introduction to Global Citizenship*, including 22 (35%) from HKU, 17 (27%) from Melbourne, and 24 (38%) from UBC. Of the total, 17 (27%) were male, and 46 (73%) were female. The vast majority (42, or 63%) of participating students were in Year 3 or 4 of an undergraduate degree, although fifteen students reported being in Year 1 or 2.

In addition to students participating from their home universities in Vancouver, Hong Kong and Melbourne, the course also attracted U21 students based in Nottingham (while on exchange), Japan (while completing a study-related work placement), from Montréal (while completing a Nursing internship) and from Bahrain and Bangkok, Thailand.

In both semesters, students represented a diverse ethnic mix that is masked by simply considering university affiliation. For example, in addition to our Hong Kong Chinese students at HKU, seven UBC or Melbourne students characterized themselves as first- or second-generation immigrants from China, offering an interesting bridging perspective. Other UBC and Melbourne students self-identified as first-generation immigrants from Egypt, Singapore, the Philippines, the United States of America, South Africa, Iran, Korea, Poland and Thailand. Some described their East Indian or European ancestry. A number also noted religious affiliations that included Catholic or Protestant Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Baha'i and Judaism.

We were especially pleased that the course attracted students from a range of academic disciplines, as shown in Figure 1. In addition to four post-graduate students (all in education-related programs) and five 'unclassified' students, we enrolled undergraduate students from degree programs in Arts, Science, Social Sciences, Resource Management, Law, Government, Business, Education, and Nursing.

Fourteen students were already registered in double degree programs (such as Arts/Law), and six indicated that they would complete their degree with a double major, suggesting that the course and *Program* appeal to academically successful students.

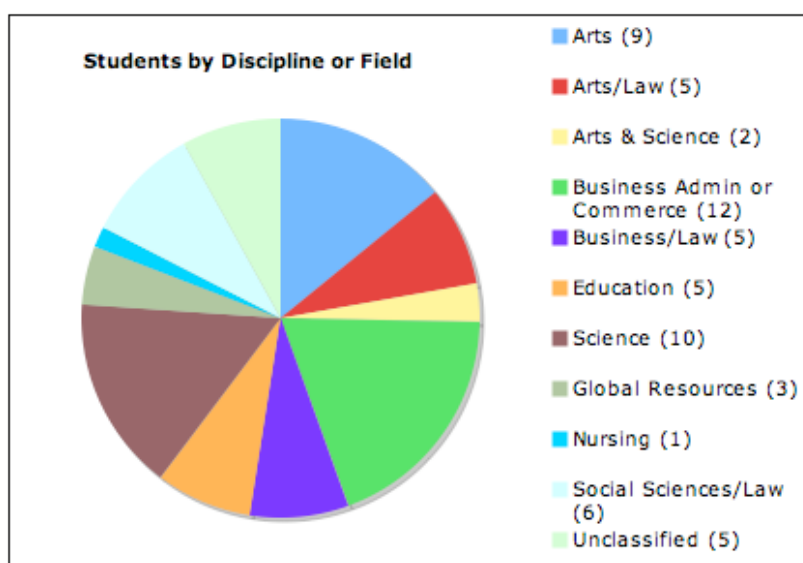


Figure 1. Distribution of registered students by degree specialization.

## Student Learning

*"I absolutely love hearing from people all around the world - it is just great to have people chatting from Hong Kong, Canada, Australia... Have really enjoyed being able to learn about different countries and how the issues affect different regions differently."*

(Student, October 2005)

We embarked upon teaching such a diverse cohort of students with some trepidation, and indeed we have found that students vary tremendously in their academic sophistication and ability to consider ideas critically, in their language skills, in their cultural and religious backgrounds, and in their disciplinary training. Nevertheless, course design and approaches to assessment allow us to assess student work based on their individual achievement and progress. Most importantly, we happily observe a good deal of peer-teaching and exchange of ideas and experience in the weekly discussion forums.

### ***Evidence of Transformative Learning***

*"...this class was different in a big way. Whereas in other classes, you can do readings and assignments, get the 3 credits and that's it..walk away..I felt like suddenly we've identified ourselves not only as students but active participants in what we're learning through the concept of global citizenship. Global citizens seemed like an abstract idea at first but slowly I think we realized that we were talking about ourselves"*

(Student, April 2006)

*"...interesting to make the connections between health, environment, media, poverty and see that in fact, everything is related, perhaps with the social and physical environment as the main link."*

(Student, April 2006)

*"The idea that impressed me most was "think global, act local""*

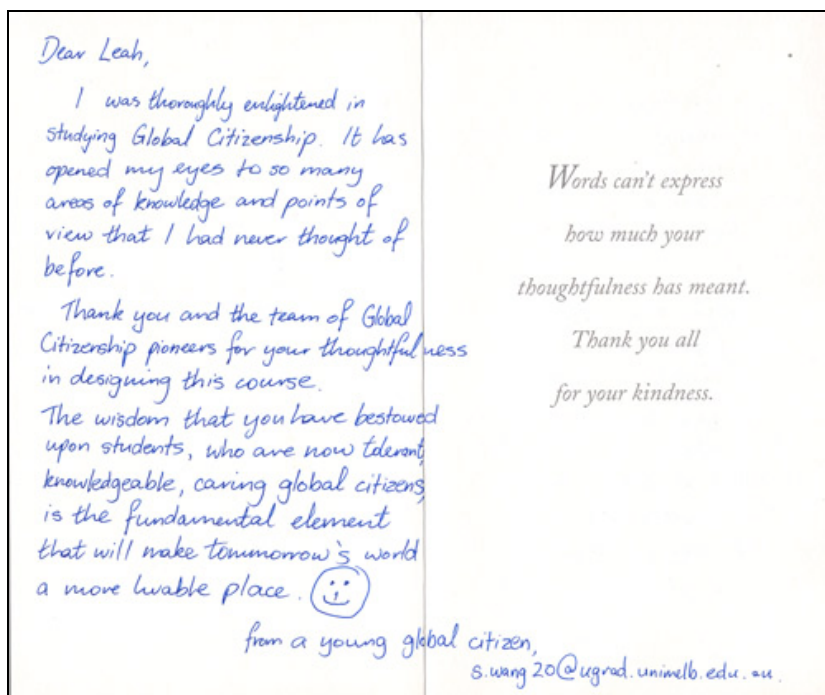
(Student, April 2006)

*"... the format of the course is not mere learning but it is REFLECTION. You are forced to reflect upon yourself and contextualize the learning experience. Basically I think that this course achieves well what ought to be the main goal of University; trigger critical thinking. This course allowed me to consolidate knowledge and relate to it. Very useful!"*

(Student, December 2005)

Through formal student feedback, and through continuing discussion threads, we feel we have witnessed at least the beginnings of perspective transformation that Mezirow (1991) and others have identified as central to a transformative learning experience. Not only did students become more practiced at critical assessment of global issues - making connections, identifying causes – but they also increasingly showed evidence of being consciously aware of the need for such critical thinking. Students clearly relished the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their learning and their own experiences in the world, and often recognized that reflection was significant in their learning.

Most significantly, most students commented on the degree to which participation in this course is motivating them to consider their life choices carefully in light of new learning (for example, consumer choices) and to become more active citizens, locally and globally.



**Figure 2. Thankyou card received from a student, December 2005**

The value of this course/Program in developing a growing group of students and graduates motivated to contribute to positive social change and global development is also highlighted by students' expressed wish to remain in contact.

We have now established an independent web-based discussion forum where course graduates can continue to discuss global issues, and exchange ideas.

### ***Student Performance***

Student performance in this course is carried out through continuous assessment of both participation in weekly discussions, and of regular 'short essay' style written work, such that grading is balanced between informal and formal writing. We found that this distribution of grades not only encouraged students to keep up with assignments and discussions, but also allowed students to be recognized for excellence in one or other area. In such a heavily discussion-oriented course, student leaders who effectively promoted and provoked discussion of difficult issues could be rewarded, as well as more research-oriented students who put more of their energies into drafting analytical papers.

In semester 1, the mean student grade was 82% (A-), with a real grade range of 57% (C-) to 95% (A+). (Semester 2 grades were not complete at time of writing).

With regards to grade distribution, the most notable correlation is with 'Year of Study'. Year 1 students performed significantly more poorly, with a mean grade of 63% (C), while students in Year 3 or 4 of study achieved an average grade of 83% (A-).



This finding closely matches our observations as instructors. While we felt that all students, without exception, made progress in their critical thinking skills and conceptual understanding, we felt strongly that younger students were hampered by their relative academic inexperience. In part, we feel that this is simply the result of ‘academic immaturity’, so that younger students have had less practice in connecting ideas, drafting effective arguments, and so on. It may also be due, in part, to lack of experience with the time management and study skills necessary for online learning, where students must be highly self-motivated.

## **Student Feedback and Course Evaluation**

Each cohort of students had three opportunities to offer us anonymous feedback on their experience in, and opinions of, the course. As instructors, we offered students the opportunity to give feedback to us as course designers and instructors at both the midway and end-point of the course. We asked broad questions about course strengths and weaknesses, and recommendations for improvement. We asked students if they could identify their most significant learning in the course, and also to tell us if they thought that any parts of the course were not valuable, or whether there was material or ‘issues’ that might be missing.

### ***Student Feedback***

In midway and end-of-course feedback, students offered overwhelmingly positive and thoughtful commentary on the course, too extensive to be compiled here. Overall, students tended to comment that they found the group online discussions extremely valuable; that they were surprised at how well the online discussions supported the development of ‘community’; and that hearing from peers in other parts of the world was illuminating. Here, and elsewhere throughout the discussions, students commented on how much they were enjoying the multidisciplinary nature of the course, and how unusual the experience was for them to be asked to think directly about applying disciplinary learning to personal choices and behaviour. We also regularly saw evidence that students were carrying this course experience into other areas of their lives:

*One of the things that I love about this course is that it makes us see both sides of every issue. ... Around the dinner table last night I brought this up and we thought that the middle ground between assimilation and multiculturalism was integration.*

As with the SCET evaluation, the most common critique from students related to workload. In the first semester in particular many students felt that a weekly written assessment was too much, on top of the reading and discussions.

A few students expressed a wish for greater in-depth exploration of topic areas, and for the possibility of focussed research and reading. We agree that further study in all areas is warranted, and trust that students will have the opportunity to explore topics of their choice in greater depth in later *Program* courses!

### ***Changes Made Based on Student Evaluation***

Based on our experience as instructors, and based on student evaluation and feedback offered at the end of the first offering, we made a number of modifications to course design and delivery before the course was offered in Spring 2006.

We rewrote the course information sections on course work and on assessment criteria and grading schemes, to try to ensure that students had clear guidelines regarding assignments and grading. We also significantly reduced the number of written assignments (from 12 to 6), and transformed most of the 'cut' essay questions into additional topics for group discussion.

In advance of September 2006, the course will be reviewed again for any necessary updates. We also plan to integrate into the course streaming video and audio recordings of guest speakers from UBC's 2005-2006 Global Citizenship Speaker Series.

We also plan to review the course reading materials, with the aim of eliminating the need for a hard-copy course reader.